

# LETTERS

## A "New Hypothesis" on Science and Religion.

*San Jose, Calif.*

Sir:

IN "The Relation of Science and Religion" (*E&S*—June, 1956), Richard Feynman defines his central question as "the problem of maintaining the real value of religion, as a source of strength and courage, while, at the same time, not requiring an absolute faith in the metaphysical aspects of religion." I cannot qualify as one of the experts requested by Dr. Feynman for his panel, but I ask to be heard as one of the hypothetical young men who has been exposed to both conventional religion and to science, and who is thereby personally confronted by this very problem.

Dr. Feynman's choice of the word "inadequate" for conventional religion is very apropos, and anyone with a sense of proportion must agree that this vast universe could hardly be a mere stage setting for "God" to observe man's struggles on a tiny speck such as the Earth. Anyone with a sense of justice must be dissatisfied with conventional religion's explanation of the suffering (especially in little children) which can be observed on all sides. How can such things be "God's will," when God is defined by conventional religion as "all-loving"? Finally, anyone with a sense of perspective must be acutely aware of Dr. Feynman's point that conventional religion's definitions of "What is God?" and "What is Man?" have had to be continually changed in light of new scientific discoveries.

It is possible that an expert on conventional religion can reconcile these problems to his own and some others' satisfaction, and I hope that this panel will have the opportunity to hear such a presentation. For my part, I ask that you (at least tem-

porarily) set to one side all of conventional religion's concepts of "God" and "Man." You may wish to rush back to them as the lesser of two evils, but at least admit that they are unsatisfying in their present form, and be willing to open your mind to another hypothesis.

Dr. Feynman provided us with an excellent point of departure. He said: "Yet again, there are the atoms, of which all appears to be constructed, following immutable laws." Every day countless experiments reconfirm the fact that physical matter behaves in accordance with impartial rules or laws, and that any apparent departure from these laws is actually a measure of our lack of understanding of the laws. Science does not make up the laws; it can only attempt to gain a better understanding of the laws which already exist.

For example, science books have long maintained that "matter cannot be created or destroyed — only changed in form." and this ironclad "law" has been used to define the conservation of energy. Einstein and atomic energy have now shown the law to be an illustration of man's lack of understanding. It turns out that both matter and energy are merely different forms of the same "substance," and that one can be created from the destruction of the other. However, the principle of conservation still applies, for the net total "substance" or "force" remains constant, even though its form is changed from physical matter to energy, or vice versa. In a moment we will attempt an extrapolation of this knowledge.

Let us first take full cognizance of our limitations, typified by this not too imaginary conversation:

1st character: "I wonder how the

universe got started?"

2nd character: "There must have been a God to create it—how else could it get started?"

1st character: "I don't know."

2nd character: "Well, if you don't know any other explanation, I must be right."

To the finite mind, there *must* be a beginning and an end. As long as finite objects are being discussed, the beginning and the end can be stretched very far apart, and it is still possible for the finite mind to encompass them. However, it just simply is not possible for the finite mind to comprehend infinity, any more than it is possible for the largest electronic brain to handle an infinite number. Let us be humble enough to admit that, to a finite, mortal human being, infinity (or "God") is literally unknowable. At most, we can only comprehend observable finite manifestations.

With this limitation in mind, I submit the following hypothesis: God is pure spiritual force, infinite in all dimensions, including time, and therefore unknowable to mortal man. All things, including physical matter, energy, and mentality are merely different forms of this universal life force, and all forms operate in accordance with universal and impartial laws. Each living human body is inhabited by an immortal unit of spiritual force called a soul, and all such units are subject to the same universal laws which apply to all other forms of the universal force. At such time as a soul becomes aware of all of these laws, and learns to live in harmony with same, it will literally become "one with God."

Let us take a deep breath and consider the personal implications of

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### Letters . . . CONTINUED

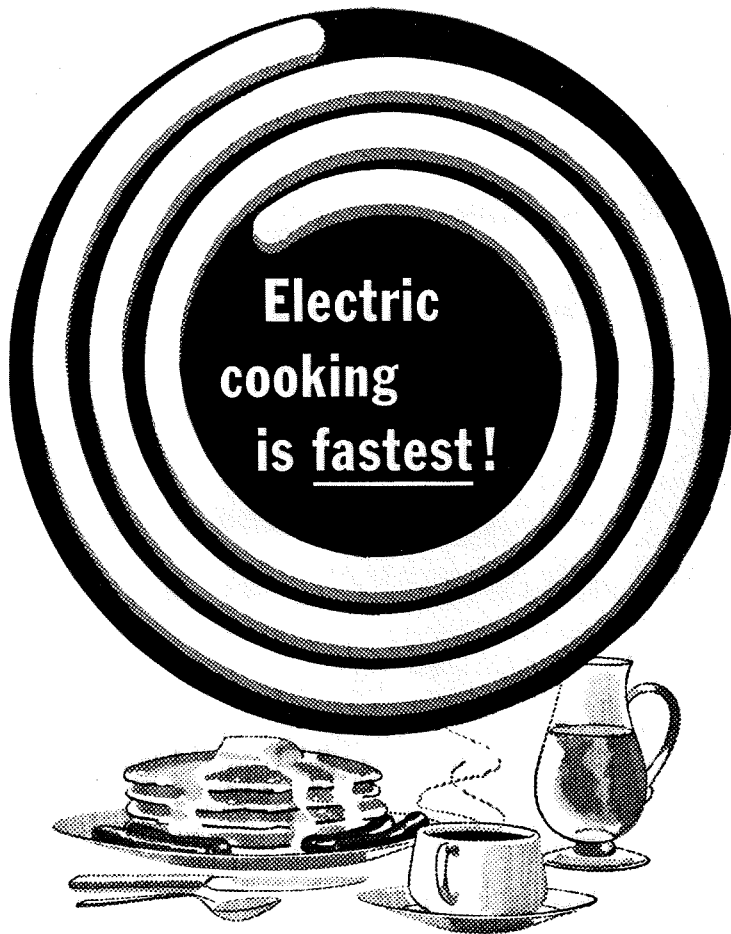
the hypothesis. It implies that each individual soul is engaged in the process of learning the laws through experience, and that this experience is being currently accumulated through reincarnation into a series of physical bodies. (Bear with me—we will dispose of Bridey Murphy in a moment.)

I respectfully maintain that this concept at least disposes of the latter part of Dr. Feynman's central problem; it has no arbitrary metaphysical aspects, but throws open the entire field of observable phenomena to searching scientific investigation. In fact, this very search for wisdom is the personal challenge of every human being, because his increase of wisdom in any one lifetime is the measure of his soul's growth in that lifetime.

#### Back to Bridey Murphy

Before going further, let us go back and put Bridey Murphy in perspective. It would be tempting to enter into a detailed discussion of Mr. Morey Bernstein's lack of knowledge, and his poor experimental techniques. However, for the sake of brevity, I will gladly concede that his experiments did not prove the existence of reincarnation, if you will in turn concede that his sloppy handling of the material did not necessarily disprove such existence. Please remember that I am submitting a hypothesis—not trying to prove it.

Assuming that we are all still keeping an open mind, let us consider some other implications of the hypothesis stated above. We have accumulated massive amounts of experimental evidence of the existence of a law of cause and effect in the area of physical matter, and we have found that a similar law also operates in the area of energy. Modern psychiatry has discovered that the same law (in more subtle forms) is equally valid in the area of mentality. Our hypothesis implies that there is a similar parallelism of



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laws throughout the entire scale of manifestation, from the grossest physical matter right on up to the most refined forms of spiritual force, and further implies that full understanding of these laws awaits only the development of adequate experimental techniques for their true nature to be determined. Here is a real frontier for the scientist with the courage of a pioneer.

#### Reincarnation

Pending scientific determination of these laws, let us consider the probable nature of one of them. From our well-documented experiments with physical matter, we are well aware of the fact that we cannot extract more gasoline from a tank than we put in at the start. The same goes for energy in a storage battery. If our hypothesis is valid, a similar law should apply at the mental level and the spiritual level. Although it has never been measured, for lack of parameters, our own empirical experience has shown that any creative endeavor must necessarily be preceded by some comparable mental effort. And when we consider the spiritual level, we find that a very wise man has already stated the exact law for us: ". . . whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap." When we combine this sound natural law with the concept of individual souls being reincarnated into a series of physical bodies, we find ourselves with a lap full of satisfactory explanations for many bothersome mysteries.

Immediately, we find that none of the suffering we see or experience results from the arbitrary and unpredictable will of some remote third-party "God." Any individual who suffers in this lifetime is merely reaping the results of suffering he imposed upon others in a previous lifetime. In a literal sense, each person "brings it on himself," through ignorance of this universal and impartial law. I suggest that there is a feeling of "rightness"

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about this concept that is bound to strike a responsive chord in any person who maintains that there should be individual responsibility for individual actions.

It is apparent from history, and from current events, that many individuals are piling up a peck of trouble for their souls in the future through their actions in this lifetime. It is high time that science got to work on the problem of checking out this law, in order that mankind may stop learning about it the hard way.

There is an excellent illustration of physical law which applies to this problem. Let us say that there are two men at the brink of a 1000-foot cliff, and we specify that one has full knowledge of the law of gravity, and that the other has no knowledge. Then, if both jump off the cliff, the man with no knowledge of the law will be just as dead at the bottom as the man with full knowledge. So, too, with the spiritual law of "as you sow." Ignorance of the law does not exempt anyone from its operation.

#### Learning the hard way

In the meantime, let us consider the impact of this concept on the first portion of Dr. Feynman's central problem—"maintaining the real value of religion as a source of strength and courage." I suggest that a personal code of conduct based on a literal acceptance of ". . . whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap," will tower far above any code imposed on the individual through fear by an external organization. In fact, I think it likely that the curious tenacity of a general moral code, even in the atheist, is nothing more than the effect of the wisdom distilled the hard way by the atheist's soul through past reincarnations.

Furthermore, it is apparent that this same concept has a built-in automatic inspiration mechanism. The individual who accepts it has a compelling personal reason for care-

fully avoiding imposing his will upon that of another, for only by such avoidance will he save himself the pain of being on the other end of the stick in some future lifetime. At the same time, he has an equally compelling reason for taking positive action to use his talents for the benefit of his fellow man. The net result is a sound *selfish* motive for doing *only* unselfish things. This, too, feels "right." At this point, we find that the same wise man who stated the law of "as ye sow," some 2000 years ago, also made a neat summary of the very point we have been trying to make. He said, "For the Kingdom of God is within thyself. . . ."

#### Evaluating human actions

As more and more evidence pours in to reinforce the impression that this is in truth a "well-ordered universe," I find it personally comforting to have a hypothesis which provides a practical basis for evaluating the many human actions (including my own) which used to appear to be proof of a "disorderly" universe. Most of all, I appreciate the fact that it places no limitations on my ability to think. On the contrary, it provides the greatest possible stimulus to think for myself, for it would be folly indeed to blindly imitate those whose ignorance of the law is permitting them to sow weeds.

In conclusion, it is necessary that I qualify the term "new hypothesis" as applied to the concept described above. Of course, it is not new at all. Millions of people accept this concept today, and millions accepted it long before Jesus Christ was born. However, in one sense the term "new hypothesis" has been used correctly, for nearly all of these millions have had to accept a large overburden of metaphysical and social dogmas along with the essential truth. Our own conventional religions, as we have seen, suffer from the same burden; the truth of Christ's teaching is buried in an un-

palatable jumble of dogma and metaphysical absurdities. Therefore, I suggest that science go to work on verifying the pure form of the universal laws suggested in this "new hypothesis," in order that all mankind may, in truth, "maintain the real value of religion as a source of strength and courage, while, at the same time, not requiring an absolute faith in the metaphysical aspects of religion."

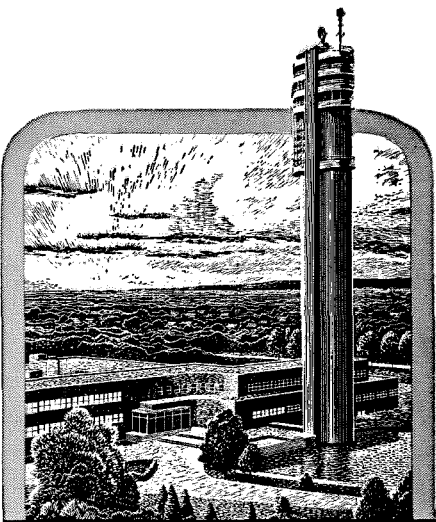
#### A direct question

I yield the floor to another member of the panel, after this aside to Dr. Feynman: Have you ever been intrigued with the question of why you have always been interested in this apparent conflict between science and conventional religion? I suggest that you have had some experience with the reincarnation concept in a previous lifetime, and that it is this distilled wisdom in your soul which now prompts you to actively question something which just doesn't feel "right." You might even confirm this yourself, by carefully rereading your original article and noticing the numerous places in which the very phrasing of your questions contains indications of the answers from the standpoint of reincarnation. Also, it might be interesting for you to recall your feelings (*not* your intellectual evaluation) regarding the above article as you read it for the first time. If you had any feeling of "seems to me I have been here before," I think you could consider that at least a partial confirmation of the fact that you have indeed "been there before."

—Stan Sohler, '41.

*Stan Sohler is owner of the Thoroughbred Business Service in San Jose, Calif. Before he went into business for himself he spent the five war years at North American Aviation, at Menasco in Burbank, and with the AAF at Wright Field.*

For Richard Feynman's reply  
—see page 52



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## Letters . . . CONTINUED

### Dr. Feynman replies to Mr. Sohler's "New Hypothesis."

MR. SOHLER presents us with another theory about why we should not make others suffer—namely, that if we do, our own soul will suffer in a later reincarnation. But that souls are reincarnated is not certain, and it seems to me that the idea would imply many metaphysical consequences.

Mr. Sohler also suggests that his hypotheses lead to verifiable consequences, for he says that it is high time science went to work to verify this "new hypothesis." So he wants to tell us what to find before we look, and it is this characteristic demand of religious theory which, I maintain, represents a conflict with the spirit of science.

Suppose that, after whatever scientific tests Mr. Sohler envisages are made, it turns out that his hypotheses are not verified. Suppose, let us say, they are even proved wrong. Would we then go out and make our neighbors suffer, being now released from the fear of retribution in a future reincarnation?

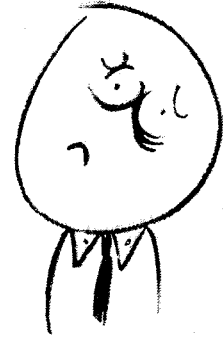
Everybody knows that somehow it is wrong to do that, but why is it necessary to get the strength to do good from a metaphysical theory of things which may eventually be in conflict with what is scientifically discovered?

That is the question I raised in my article. It is not answered by choosing a particular religion from West or East and claiming that its metaphysical consequences must be verified by future scientific research, while those of other religions are manifest absurdities. That is the old way.

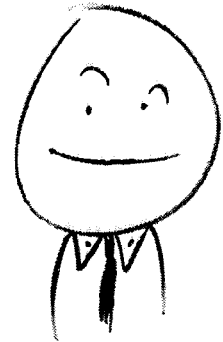
What message would Mr. Sohler have for someone who doubts the reality of reincarnation? Our scientific experience teaches us that any definite theory of the world that we can formulate today is probably wrong. We ought to be able to live even better lives, knowing that.



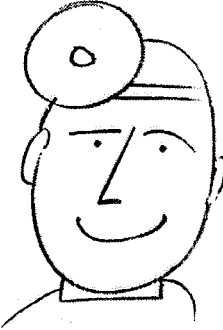
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